

Outdoor Recreational Resources and Opportunities of the Superior Coastal Plain

The Superior Coastal Plain ecological landscape hosts an abundance of outdoor recreation activities. It is a popular destination for people from around Wisconsin and the Midwest. Large tracts of conservation lands open to public recreational use offer excellent scenery and both accessible and remote settings and draw visitors from outside the region. Many visit to see the thundering waters of Amnicon Falls, Pattison Falls, and Copper Falls State Parks. Others to try their luck at landing a trophy smallmouth bass in Chequamegon Bay or paddle the sea caves of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

The recreational activities focused on in this planning process and presented in this section are nature-based and motorized activities that generally take place in natural or undeveloped settings. The information summarized in this section and gathered during the public input process will be used to determine how DNR properties, in conjunction with other public lands, can best meet the region's recreation needs. The department's master planning team must consider the purpose of the property and its natural resources when developing the objectives and prescriptions that shape the recreation components of the master plan.

Recreational Activities in the Superior Coastal Plain

The following summarizes outdoor recreational activities that occur on department properties in the Superior Coastal Plain. The information for these summaries is sourced from several documents, including:

- Wisconsin DNR Ecological Landscapes Handbook (WDNR 2015b)
- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report
- 2017 DNR Recreation Opportunity Analysis (ROA) for Great Northwest Region

The regional master planning process is organized around the natural boundaries of ecological landscapes. However, the data and information sources used in examining the recreational resources often utilize political boundaries. The SCORP reports data for the entirety of Wisconsin. The recreation opportunity analysis for the Great Northwest region includes information for the counties of Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Polk, Rusk, and Sawyer. The Superior Coastal Plain consists of portions of Ashland, Bayfield, and Burnett counties with a very small portion of the SCP falling in Iron County (see landscape map). To the extent possible, this section addresses recreation opportunity in the Superior Coastal Plain ecological landscape. When information is referring to a larger region that contains the SCP, it is noted as such.

To examine the recreational opportunities and challenges present in the SCP, this section organizes activities by type.



Water-based Activities

Fishing

The Superior Coastal Plain is a major draw for anglers due to its diversity of water types. Lake Superior provides big-water fishing opportunities for anglers pursuing cold-water species such as Lake Trout and Whitefish in the open water. Chequamegon Bay hosts a world-class fishery for warmer water species, including smallmouth bass. The Cranberry, Onion, and White Rivers, as well as numerous tributaries and other rivers are popular locations to pursue trout.

The department offers access through improved boat launches on many of its properties, and shore fishing is allowed on all department lands. Most other public lands in the region offer access to shore fishing. The Great Northwest ROA suggests fishing opportunities could be expanded to Amnicon State Park. Additional fishing opportunities may be possible at Copper Falls State Park and the South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area.

Canoeing/Kayaking

The SCP ecological landscape is an excellent destination for paddling sports. Its many winding rivers offer quality paddling experiences for any skill level. The landscape boasts several waterbodies designated as Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters. These uncommon waters have received state designation because they support valuable fisheries and wildlife habitat, provide outstanding recreational opportunities, have not been adversely impacted by human activities, and are the highest quality waters in Wisconsin. Many department properties have canoe/kayak launches and several offer campsites that can only be accessed by paddling. Canoes and kayaks can be carried into waters from any department property, not just those with improved boat launches.

Motorboating

The relatively low amount of inland lakes within this region compared to the rest of Wisconsin limits motorboating activities such as tubing and water skiing. Lake Superior is popular for driving motorboats, but skiing and tubing are less so due to the cool water temperature. Bark Bay Slough Natural Area and Big Bay State Park facilitate motorboating. The Great Northwest ROA did not identify additional opportunities for boat launches capable of handling motorboats within the SCP.

Trail-based Activities

Hiking, walking, or running on trails

Hiking or walking is the most popular recreational activity undertaken in Wisconsin (SCORP). Opportunities for hiking in the SCP include state and national trails, hunter walking trails, and numerous trails within the EL's state parks. The North Country National Scenic Trail cuts through this region as part of its more than 4,000-mile journey from North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea State Park to Crown Point, New York and offers opportunities for day hiking trips or longer backpacking expeditions (DNR North Country Trail Site). Other hiking areas offer many opportunities for short trips.

Owing to the activity's popularity, the public has expressed a desire to have more hiking, walking, or running trails. In the survey conducted for the Great Northwest ROA, this was the largest area of need identified by respondents. All DNR lands, and most other public lands in the region, are open to hikers. However, the level of development of trails, if they exist, varies dramatically across properties.



Opportunities may exist to improve hunter walking access trails and other primitive or lightly developed trails on department properties. Additionally, the Great Northwest ROA identified Copper Falls, Amnicon Falls, and Pattison State Parks as areas where additional hiking trails may be created. Other opportunities to expand significant longer hiking trails on department properties may also be explored. Developing longer hiking trails that cross non-DNR managed properties is a challenge given the many variables in trail building. Nevertheless, the department is considering areas on department lands where the North Country Trail may be accommodated.

Bicycling

Bicycling in the SCP is a diverse activity that encompasses road cycling, mountain/fat tire biking, and off-road trail riding. There are many bicycling opportunities both on and off department properties in the SCP. All roads, except major highways, are open to bicycling and road cyclists readily take advantage of this opportunity. Off-road and mountain biking facilities exist at Copper Falls State Park. Other opportunities exist near, but outside, the SCP such as the Chequamegon Area Mountain Biking Association (CAMBA) trail system.

Off-road and mountain biking trails have been identified as an area of need by both the SCORP and the Great Northwest ROA. The ROA also identified paved bicycling trails, which can be utilized by road cyclists, as a priority. Copper Falls State Park is potentially a viable area to add to existing mountain bike trails; and Big Bay, Pattison, and Amnicon Falls State Parks may be opportune areas to introduce mountain biking according to the Great Northwest ROA. Additional bicycling tour and road riding opportunities are numerous as they can be served by existing road infrastructure.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding occurs on both public and private lands in the Superior Coastal Plain. Due to the skill and cost needed to be involved, this is a specialized sport. The Great Northwest is not among the areas in the state where this activity is most popular. Of the 7% of respondents to the SCORP survey that indicated they participate in horseback riding, 55% indicated they do so 1-2 times per year.

The Brule River State Forest and Douglas County Forests offer horseback riding opportunities on designated trails. All department managed roads are open to horseback riding, and some township and County roads may also be open to horseback riding.

Cross-country skiing

The SCP receives an average of 87.4 inches of snow annually, making it a destination for cross-country skiers. Residents of the Great Northwest region participate in cross-country skiing at a higher rate than other regions of the state. Cross-country skiing can be done across all department properties, though most participants prefer groomed trails. The Great Northwest ROA suggests Amnicon Falls State Park may be able to support introducing cross-country skiing trails and Big Bay State Park, Pattison State Park, and South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area may be able to expand on the opportunities that already exist.

Motorized trail activities

Motorized trail-based recreation covers four similar, but distinct, activities: snowmobiling, ATV/UTV riding, four-wheel drive vehicle driving, and off-highway motorcycle riding. There are two-types of motorized access to department lands for these activities: access for street legal vehicles on roads maintained for public use; and trails



and routes for motorized vehicles. Snowmobiles are somewhat unique in their seasonal nature and in that local and regional clubs maintain large networks of snowmobile trails that cross private lands. These regional trail networks usually use department lands primarily as connectors between long trail segments.

The Great Northwest region has the most existing opportunity for ATV/UTV riding compared to other recreational regions. However, there is little opportunity to expand these beyond opportunities, especially in the SCP ecological landscape. A small connecting segment of a motorized recreation trail currently crosses a portion of Amnicon Falls State Park, but there is limited opportunity to expand. Non-DNR lands or lands not included in this planning process also provide motorized trail recreational opportunities. Bayfield and Douglas County Forests offer 152 miles of ATV trails combined. ATVs are allowed on many town roads and street legal dual-sport motorcycles and 4WD vehicles are allowed on all department roads as well.

Non-Trail Activities that Take Place on Department Properties

Gathering Wild Edibles

Many Wisconsinites gather wild nuts, berries, plants, and mushrooms on public and private lands. In the SCORP survey, 37% of respondents indicated they gather wild edibles at some point during the year. All department properties are open to this activity.

Hunting and Trapping

Hunting and trapping are among Wisconsin's most cherished traditions and most department properties are open to hunting, except for designated areas closed to hunting for all or part of the year. Given the large amount of public land, there is a large amount of hunting opportunity in the Superior Coastal Plain. Many hunter walking trails exist on department properties, but there may be opportunity to add trails where access is poor.

The department has launched recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts to bring additional hunters into the activity. R3 is not a series of events or one-time activities meant to promote the sports of hunting and fishing, but rather a need to continuously engage with and provide participants the opportunity to have high quality experiences while hunting and fishing. The master planning process can serve as a key feature in R3 efforts by creating a plan that, if properly implemented, ensures the department's properties can provide the high-quality experiences in hunting and fishing that keep participants in the sports. As the Great Northwest ROA noted, this is especially important in the Superior Coastal Plain EL where hunting and fishing are already popular activities.

Wildlife Viewing, Outdoor Education and Interpretation

The Superior Coastal Plain's scenic beauty and abundant wildlife create excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing, nature photography, and outdoor education. The Bayfield Peninsula offers tremendous views of Lake Superior throughout the year. The Apostle Islands and the nationally designated lakeshore that shares their name offer a unique island perspective for these activities. The numerous natural areas within the EL provide visitors with the chance to view and learn about rare ecosystems. Furthermore, the concentrations of migrating birds, especially waterfowl, on and near Lake Superior provides a stimulating wildlife watching experience for even the most amateur of birders.

Outdoor education and nature photography are facilitated by many DNR partners (National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service among others) in the area outside of the DNR. The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center is a



popular place for visitors and locals alike to learn about the ecology and history of the region. Most of the DNR properties within the SCP offer educational activities. The Great Northwest ROA suggests opportunities to add to these activities may exist at Copper Falls and Pattison State Parks as well as White River Wildlife Area near Ashland.

Rock Climbing

Rock climbing is a specialized sport that is more predominant in the southern portion of Wisconsin than the Superior Coastal Plain. The ROA identified rock climbing as a low-priority for the region, but also noted that Copper Falls, Amnicon Falls, and Pattison State Parks may have the ability to add rock climbing facilities should the need arise.

Target Shooting – Archery and Firearms

Target shooting by archery or firearm is a popular activity in the Great Northwest ROA region, with survey respondents indicating they take part in the activity at rates higher than the state average. The ROA identified firearms target shooting as a medium future need and archery as a low future need. These activities are accommodated on non-department public and private lands in the region. ROA findings suggest there may be opportunity to add archery target shooting to several state parks and wildlife areas in the region.

Camping

Camping takes place in a variety of settings in the Superior Coastal Plain, from primitive sites that are accessible only by hiking and offer few accommodations outside of a fire ring; to well-developed accessible sites with electrical hookups. Camping is not allowed on every property in the SCP. The four state parks in the region offer the full range of camping opportunities and all except Big Bay were identified by the ROA as having opportunity to expand either developed campsites, primitive campsites, or both. Camping has been identified as a high priority for future master planning efforts by the ROA.

Additional Public Conservation Lands in the Superior Coastal Plain

While this planning process is solely for Wisconsin DNR owned properties, to properly examine the true scope of recreation activities in the Superior Coastal Plain, department lands must be considered in the context of recreational opportunity on other public lands. Thus, this planning effort will consider available opportunity on lands open to the public that are not owned by DNR when addressing recreational challenges and opportunities in the Superior Coastal Plain. Prominent public conservation lands not included in this planning effort that help serve the public's recreational needs include:

State Trails in the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape

The following [State Trails](#) are managed for public recreational uses by their respective counties of origin, through a partnership agreement with the DNR Parks and Recreation program.

1. [Gandy Dancer State Trail](#) Douglas, Burnett, & Polk counties
2. [Wild Rivers State Trail](#) Douglas, Washburn, & Barron counties
3. [Saunders State Trail](#) Douglas County
4. [North Country National Scenic Trail](#) Douglas, Bayfield, & Ashland counties



Water Trails in the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape

[Water trails](#) provide a network of access points, resting places and attractions for users of water craft on lakes and rivers.

1. [Lake Superior State Water Trail \(Northwest Regional Plan Commission\)](#)
2. [Minnesota St. Louis River State Water Trail](#) (State of MN)
3. [St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail](#) (MN Partnership)

County/Municipal Properties in the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape

County-owned lands in the SCP Ecological Landscape (> 88,000 ac) provide significant opportunities for public recreation that are complementary to state-owned (DNR) lands (WDNR 2015). Prominent examples of these public resources include:

1. [Bayfield County Forestry & Parks](#)
2. [Douglas County Forestry, Parks & Recreation](#)
3. [Superior Municipal Forest](#)
4. [Ashland County Forestry & Recreation](#)
5. [Wrenshall Grade Recreational Trail](#)

Federal Properties in the Superior Coastal Plain Ecological Landscape

Federal forest and park lands in the SCP (>43,000 ac) offer significant opportunities for public recreation. These properties include:

1. [North Country National Scenic Trail](#) (National Park Service)
2. [Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest](#)
3. [Apostle Islands National Lakeshore](#) (42,308 ac across 21 Islands and 12 miles of Bayfield Co mainland)
4. [Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge](#) (300 ac)

